

		AGENDA ITEM 4
		CPSC/05/19
Committee:	Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
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Equalities as a 'Golden Thread' at Essex County Council

Summary/Purpose:

To highlight the progress made in embedding equalities across the organisation, setting out the process for Essex County Council (ECC) to seek reaccreditation under the LGA's Equality Framework for Local Government in June 2019.

Current status/current issues

The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, and other public bodies, to pay due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity, eliminate discrimination and foster good relations with different groups in the exercising its functions. It acts as a reminder that there can be no fair society if some groups and communities remain disadvantaged because of their legally protected characteristics.¹

The Duty requires public services, including ECC, to publish at least one equality objective every four years. ECC refreshed and published its equality objectives in February 2018, after a period of internal and public consultation from October 2017 to January 2018. The equality objectives set out below and are aligned to the strategic aims set out within the Organisation Strategy 2017-2021:

¹ These are: age, sex, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy & maternity, marriage & civil partnership and religion/belief.

No	Strategic Aims (SA)	Strategic Priorities (SP)	Equality Objectives (EO)
1	Enable inclusive economic growth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Help people in Essex prosper by increasing their skills 2. Enable Essex to attract and grow large firms in high growth industries 3. Target economic development to areas of opportunity 	We will tackle the causes of disadvantage, ensuring that all Essex residents can access good jobs and an excellent education, regardless of their background.
2	Help people get the best start and age well	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Help keep vulnerable children safe and enable them to fulfil their potential 2. Enable more vulnerable adults to live more independent of Social Care 3. Improve the health of the people of Essex 	We will remove the obstacles that hold Essex residents back, tackling inequalities between children and supporting older people to live independently with dignity.
3	Help create great places for people to grow up, live & work	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Help secure stronger, safer and more neighbourly communities 2. Help secure sustainable development and protect the environment 3. Facilitate growing communities and new homes 	We will help people to travel across Essex, bringing communities together and connecting them to services, employment and learning opportunities.
4	Transform the council to achieve more with less	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Limit cost and drive growth in revenue 2. Develop the capability, performance and engagement of our people 3. Re-imagine how residents' needs can be met in a digital world 	We will employ a diverse workforce, drawing on the different values and experiences that reflect the communities we serve.

This approach has meant that, whilst ECC no longer has a separate equalities strategy, equalities activities are aligned to respective functional business plans. However, further work is ongoing to ensure that the 'golden thread' is fully embedded in terms of key deliverables, performance and monitoring reporting arrangements linked to these activities at organisational, functional and service level.

For 2018/19, the Equalities & Partnerships Team have led on the work to achieve, or are on track to achieve, a number of outcomes including:

- Launched the first Essex Hate Crime strategy with partners to ensure a coordinated response to victims and families across the County (SA/EO 3, SP 3.1)
- Created an accessible community hub for citizens with learning, physical and sensory disabilities on the ground floor library area at County Hall (SA/EO 3, SP 3.1)

- Assessed as a Disability Confident Leader (SA/EO 4, SP 4.2)
- Strengthened the relationship between faith-based organisations and public services within the Faith Covenant areas (SA/EO 3, SP 3.1).

Currently, looking across the whole organisation at a functional level, the following activities also demonstrate how our equalities objectives are being delivered:

- Delivered seamless social work to disabled children and young people by moving social workers into teams that offer a service from birth to 25 years old (SP/EO 2, SP 2.1)
- Launched an Inclusion Statement for Essex schools to support the SEND reforms (SP/EO 2, SP 2.1)
- Created 38 new homes through Essex Housing, including 15 independent living homes for people with learning disabilities (SP/EO 3, SP 3.3)
- Developed and launched the Workforce Strategy (People Plan) (SP/EO 4, SP 4.2)
- Published the updated Essex Design Guide online, including new content on digital, the ageing population and Garden Communities to improve new housing developments (SP/EO 3, SP 3.3)
- Delivered the Joint Health and Well Being Strategy for Essex, with a focus on Improving mental health and wellbeing, health inequalities and enabling and supporting people with long-term conditions and disabilities (SP/EO 2, SP 2.3)
- Developed new accommodation and employment pathways for people with mental health problems (SP/EO2, SP 2.2).

However, we know there is still more to do, and during 2019/20 the Equalities & Partnerships Team will continue to build on the above, and in addition will focus on:

- Working with Essex Partners to address challenges faced by our communities, such as deprivation (The IMD shows that deprivation has increased in all of our district areas, with the most affluent areas suffering the worst increase) and social mobility (research by the Social Mobility Foundation shows that social mobility is poor in some of our communities, particularly in coastal areas)
- Continuing to deliver the ambitions set out within the Vision for Essex
- Creating a 'centre of excellence' for equalities and partnerships in the UK to drive whole system transformation so we can exemplify best practice in this area, providing peer to peer support to partners both regionally and nationally
- Launching an improved equality impact assessment framework for the organisation that will help understand cumulative impact and better inform our decision-making processes in view of the continuing budget challenges
- Looking to retain our 'excellent status' of the Equalities Framework for Local Government, issued by the LGA.

In addition, for 2019/20, the following activities demonstrate how our equalities objectives will be delivered across the organisation:

- Increase the number of apprenticeships delivered through Adult Community Learning (SA/EO 1, SP 1.1)
- Implement a strategy to tackle teenage pregnancy (SA/EO 2, SP 2.1)
- Create 40 new homes through Essex Housing, including 8 Independent Living homes for people with learning disabilities (SA/EO 3, SP 3.3)
- Support partners to explore establishing a Muslim Council for Essex (SA/EO 3, SP 3.1)
- Progress the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot to improve physical activity in the population for older people, those with mental health needs and families in disadvantaged areas (SP/EO 2, SP 2.3)
- Lead work with Essex Partners to develop options for addressing homelessness issues across the County (SA/EO 3, SP 3.1)
- Deliver a refreshed evidence base in support of delivering a new Essex Skills Strategy (SA/EO 1, SP 1.1).

LGA Equalities Framework for Local Government

On the above final point, ECC was reaccredited as 'excellent' for its equalities work by the LGA in 2016. The award is made for a period of three years and the LGA has been invited back for a site visit on 26-27 June 2019 as part of the reaccreditation process. The LGA will want to meet a cross section of officers, elected members and wider stakeholders to understand how equalities and inclusion are embedded within the Organisation. ECC is also required to complete a detailed self-assessment against the five performance areas:

- Knowing your communities
- Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment
- Involving your Communities
- Responsive Services and Customer Care
- Skilled and Committed Workforce.

A detailed narrative that outlines ECC's 'equalities journey' since 2016 will be developed and will be submitted as part of the required wider evidence base. The context for the narrative will be based around how ongoing consideration to equalities is firmly rooted in both policy and practice. It will also set out a detailed account of the organisation's equality achievements and outcomes. This will be complemented by a suite of evidence, including case studies, which will aim to demonstrate how the 'excellent' level criteria of the EFLG have been met. The topics that case studies will focus on have yet to be determined but will cover all five performance areas.

In 2016, a Cross Organisational Editorial Group was set up to assist in the coordination of the self-assessment and to be the main point of contact for the development of the supporting case studies and the link back to their respective functional areas. For the 2019 assessment, it is proposed that we use the membership of the Equalities Coordinators Network to take on this role. They will act as a conduit back to their FLT on progress towards accreditation and develop potential case studies for inclusion in the final submission.

Appendix 1

High-level Timetable for Reaccreditation

